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Bilinguality vs. Monolinguality among Kalhuri Kurdish Speakers: Gender, Social Class and English Language Achievement

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Abstract

Today in multilingual contexts, many parents prefer to rear their children in the dominant language rather than in their mother tongue. This phenomenon is widespread among native speakers of Kalhuri dialect of the Kurdish language in the multilingual context of Iran, too. Being such a widespread issue, bilinguality has attracted increasing research interest and, accordingly, some studies have evidenced its effects on learning an additional language while some others have provided counterevidence in this regard. The present study chiefly intended to see if there was any difference between Kalhuri Kurdish learners reared monolingually (using Persian) and the ones reared bilingually (using both Kalhuri and Persian) in terms of their achievement in English. In addition, it aimed at exploring the relationship between gender and socioeconomic status and bilinguality vs. monolinguality. To achieve these purposes, data were gathered from 200 bilingual and 200 monolingual Kurd students, living in Kermanshah, whose parents' native language was the Kalhuri dialect of Kurdish. Analyses of the data indicated that although gender had no significant relationship with bilinguality vs. monolinguality, most students from low socioeconomic class were reared bilingually. Moreover, the students reared bilingually outperformed their monolingual counterparts in terms of achievement in English.

Keywords: bilinguals, monolinguals, Kalhuri Kurdish speakers, ELT

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1. Introduction

Bilingualism is a rather vague term which has been defined differently by various scholars. It is often employed loosely to include multilingualism: as Bhatia and Ritchie (2012) state “the investigation of bilingualism is a broad and complex field, including the study of the nature of the individual bilingual’s knowledge and use of two (or more) languages” (p. 5). Specifically speaking, from the perspective of second language acquisition (SLA) researchers, *bilingual* is a difficult term. In its narrowest sense, the term refers to someone who has learned and now knows two languages and whose languages are in steady states. In this sense, bilingual refers to an end point—i.e., *someone is bilingual*. However, within second language research contexts, the end-point interpretation of the term is generally not the focus of inquiry; rather, second language researchers, because of their interest in exploring the second language acquisition process, might focus instead on near-native speakers or advanced language learners. In addition, SLA researchers are interested in exploring the relationship between bilinguality and learning another language.

Knowing more than one language is generally considered as an asset. Baker and Jones (1998) consider communicative, cultural, economic, and cognitive advantages as some of the major advantages associated with being bilingual. With regard to the communicative advantage of bilinguality, they state that bilinguals, living in a world of regular language monitoring, often show greater sensitivity to the communicative needs of others. Similarly, experience in more than one culture provides an understanding of cultural differences among different people. Economic advantages also abound in all areas of work and business. And last but not least, there are cognitive advantages such as divergent thinking, creative thinking, and metalinguistic awareness.

Metalinguistic ability allows individuals to think about language as an object of inquiry rather than as something merely used for speaking and understanding others. Bialystok (2001a, 2001b) maintains that bilingual children have superior abilities in judging grammatical accuracy than their monolingual counterparts. Maneva and Genesee (2002) point out that children who have been exposed to two languages from birth demonstrate language-specific patterns in their babbling and, thus, can already distinguish between the two languages before their first birthday. Finally, Cook (2005) argues that there are impacts of multilingualism on how people process their native language, even on people with a minimal knowledge of a second language. Cook adds that

the monolingual orientation of SLA belies the reality of the context of language learning in much of the world where knowledge of more than one language is the norm.

In the past few decades, particularly following the revolutionary work of Peal and Lambert (1962), many studies have espoused the advantages of being bilingual over being monolingual in a number of areas. A number of these studies have focused on the metalinguistic advantages of bilingualism. For example, Hamers and Blanc (cited in Doughty & Long, 2003) reported that bilingual children performed better on problem-solving tasks than their monolingual peers. The authors maintain that these results can be attributed to the greater metalinguistic competence and better developed creative processes of the bilinguals. According to Baker (2006, p. 54), "Bilingual children have more fluent, flexible and creative thinking. They can communicate more naturally and expressively, maintaining a finer texture of relationships with parents and grandparents, as well as with the local and wider communities in which they live". Baker claims that bilingual children gain the benefits of two sets of literatures, traditions, ideas, ways of thinking and behaving. They can act as a bridge between people of different colors, creeds and cultures. He goes on to say that

With two languages come a wider cultural experience, greater tolerance of differences and less racism. As barriers to movement between countries are removed, the earning power of bilinguals rises. Further advantages include raised self-esteem, increased achievement, and greater proficiency with other languages. (Baker, 2006 p. 25)

Many researchers have attempted to show why such differences exist. For example, in a series of studies, Bialystok (2001b) found that bilinguals were better able to control their attention and performed significantly better than their monolingual counterparts on tasks in which they were given misleading information. She studied children and elaborated on 'representational analysis' versus 'attentional control' among children (p. 147). She concluded that bilingual children have advantages over monolinguals in tasks which require a high level of attentional control— i.e., tasks that include misleading, distracting or irrelevant information. In another study, Bialystok and Martin (2004) showed that children and even adults who had advanced levels of proficiency in two languages had cognitive advantages over monolinguals.

1.1 Bilingualism and learning another language

Some researchers have focused on the effect of bilingualism on learning an additional language. Perhaps, Ringbom and Thomas (1988 cited in Ringbom, 2007) are the first pioneers in this regard. They compared monolingual English college students with two English-Spanish bilingual groups who were learning English. The first bilingual group received no formal training whereas the second bilingual group received a minimum of two years' formal training in Spanish. The results indicated that the bilinguals with the formal training outperformed the other two groups in learning grammar; moreover, the two bilingual groups outperformed their monolingual counterparts in learning vocabulary though there was no significant difference between the bilingual groups. Similarly, Ringbom (2007) compared monolingual Finnish with bilingual Finnish-Swedish speakers learning English as a foreign language. The result of this study also indicated a bilingual advantage.

In another study, Sanz (2000) compared 124 Catalan-Spanish bilinguals with 77 Spanish monolinguals who were learning English and attempted to control variables such as socioeconomic background, motivation, attitudes, general intelligence and exposure to English. The general English proficiency of the participants was measured using grammar and vocabulary tests. The results showed that bilingual participants scored higher on the tests than their monolingual peers. Finally, Munoz (2000) compared third language (English) acquisition of bilinguals knowing Catalan and Castilian with their monolingual counterparts. The researcher tested three groups (aged 9, 12 and 17) on different English proficiency tests: dictation, cloze, multiple-choice grammar and listening comprehension. The results showed that highly proficient bilinguals, those who had good competence in Catalan and Castilian, scored higher than the monolinguals on all the tests.

Although the researchers mentioned above consider a positive role for bilingualism in learning another language, a few researchers maintain that bilingualism has either no, or even a negative, role in learning an additional language. For instance, Van Gelderen et al. (2003) compared the English (foreign language) reading comprehension of 397 Dutch monolinguals and Turkish or Moroccan-Dutch bilinguals in the Netherlands. They employed a componential analysis to determine which factor was responsible for the differences in the participants' reading comprehension ability in English. They found that bilinguals had a lower reading comprehension ability than monolinguals. They tried to account for the phenomenon on the grounds that a) Turkish and Moroccan-Dutch

bilinguals were weaker in reading comprehension in Dutch, b) the socioeconomic status of bilinguals was not controlled, and c) English is closer to Dutch than to either Turkish or Moroccan.

In addition, Sanders and Meijers (cited in Bhatia & Ritchie, 2012) compared 15 Dutch monolinguals with 46 Turkish-Dutch and 31 Moroccan-Arabic bilinguals in learning English as a second or third language. They collected data from 10 different elementary schools in the Dutch cities of Utrecht, Tilburg and Nijmegen and the socioeconomic and intelligence factors were controlled. The researchers found no significant difference between bilinguals and monolinguals on several English proficiency tests. Finally, Okita and Jun Hai (2001) carried out a study of Chinese monolinguals and Chinese-English bilinguals in the learning of the Japanese writing system, Kanji, which is close to the Chinese writing system, Hanzi. In this study, monolinguals achieved better scores than their bilingual counterparts. The researchers tried to justify this observation by explaining that the bilinguals were from Singapore and did not have a strong command of the Chinese writing system.

1.2 Socio-economic status, gender, and bilingualism

In addition to the controversial opinions and findings about the impact of bilinguality on additional language learning, differences in second (or additional) language learning have sometimes been attributed to various social variables. Self-evidently, every society can be internally divided into different groups when such social factors as gender, socio-economic status, level of education or ethnicity are taken into consideration. These are also factors which, at the micro level, may influence an individual's choice of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in first language and, at the macro level, choice of one language over another in a multilingual society. With regard to the choice of language made by children with different levels of socio-economic status, Coulmas (1997) asserts that the lower the status and position of individuals in the social class hierarchy, the smaller the opportunity that they use standard language forms. The researcher claims that middle socio-economic class children develop explicit use of language, whereas lower socio-economic class children develop a more implicit language use. He goes on to add that in spite of all these facts, the social class is not an insurmountable obstacle to access the benefits of bilingualism.

A couple of studies carried out in this area support the effect of socioeconomic status (SES) on language learning in general and on L2

learning in particular. For instance, Hakuta, Butler, & Witt (2000) reported that classifying children in two school districts by SES showed large effects of poverty and parental level of education on children's progress in mastering both oral and academic uses of English as an L2. In another study, Ransdell and Wengelin (2003, p. 3) concluded that bilingual children often come from economically disadvantaged families and, therefore, SES differences may be driving "bilingual" disadvantages in academic skill development, especially in an L2.

As for the relationship between gender and choice of language, in many language contexts, the dominant language which is usually perceived as the power code is associated with masculinity, and the minority language with femininity and domestic values (Pavlenko, 2001). This implies that gender and language interact in ways that make bilingualism have different meanings to different groups. For example, in some communities, women may be given less access to a second prestigious language, restricting their bilingualism; however, the opposite can also occur (Baker, 2006).

On the other hand, investigations into the relationship between gender and bilingualism have reported superiority of female learners. For instance, Bowey's (1995) study of 500 Chinese university students studying English in Hong Kong supported female superiority in general language proficiency. Likewise, Jorgensen (2003) conducted two large-scale studies to investigate gender differences in bilingualism with Swedish children learning English and immigrant children learning Swedish. He noticed that girls showed higher levels of proficiency in both cases. He explained the differences based on cognitive variables, brain function, and cultural differences. Nonetheless, Ellis (2008) has pointed out that female superiority in bilingualism is disputable because the motivation and incentive for being bilingual may differ in women and men depending on the types of opportunities that a second language creates and makes available to them. Accordingly, it seems that the question whether differences in second/additional language learning may be due to language status (being monolingual vs. bilingual), socioeconomic status or gender still confronts SLA researchers.

2. Statement of the Problem and Research Objectives

In spite of the purported advantages of bilinguality (some of which have been supported empirically), parents, educators, and professionals often express concerns about raising children bilingually (see Genesee, 2009). Today, in most multilingual contexts, wherein one language is the

official and dominant language, most parents prefer to rear their children in the dominant language rather than in their mother tongue. This phenomenon is widespread in the multilingual context of Iran too and most minority language parents– including native speakers of the Kalhuri dialect of the Kurdish language spoken in the West Part of Iran (mostly in Kermanshah and Ilam provinces)– prefer to rear their children in the dominant language–i.e., Persian. However, it is not clear if the tendency to rear children monolingually or bilingually is related to the gender of the children or whether this tendency is affected by the socioeconomic status of the parents or not.

On the other hand, regarding the impact of language status (bilingual vs. monolingual) on learning another language, results of the studies (reviewed above) are rather vague and inconsistent; moreover, most of the studies have merely focused on one aspect of language learning (e.g., vocabulary or reading comprehension) and few, if any, studies have been done on the impact of bilinguality vs. monolinguality on the learning of an additional language as a whole. Therefore, the present research attempts to delve into the issue by making a comparison between the students reared monolingually and the ones reared bilingually in terms of their achievement in English. Of course, it should be admitted that the test employed in the present study to measure the participants' English language achievement did not deal with writing ability and oral proficiency, either. However, in the absence of any better measure of English language achievement, making the intended comparison among the participants of the present study possible, this test (which is supposed to be more comprehensive than those employed by other researchers in the literature reviewed above) could serve the purpose of the present study. In line with the points raised above, this study addresses the following questions:

1. Is gender significantly related to bilinguality vs. monolinguality of the students?
2. Is socioeconomic status significantly related to bilinguality vs. monolinguality of the students?
3. Which variable(s)–i.e., gender, socioeconomic level and/or language status–exert(s) a significant effect on the students' English language achievement?

3. Method

3.1 Participants and sampling procedure

The participants of the present study were selected from Kalhuri monolingual and bilingual students living in Kermanshah. Since the tendency to raise children monolingually (in the dominant language of Persian) rather than bilingually (in both Kurdish and Persian) is more conspicuous among parents speaking the Kurdish Kalhuri dialect, which is mostly spoken in Kermanshah and Ilam provinces, rather than among speakers of other Kurdish dialects (i.e., Hawrami, Surani or Kurmanji), the participants were selected from the speakers of this dialect. It is important to add that, generally speaking, the Kurdish-Persian learners in Kermanshah use Persian extensively in their everyday life, so it could safely be presumed that the bilingual participants of the study were advanced or near native speakers of Persian. Moreover, in order for the research to have a uniform criterion to compare the achievement of the participants in English, they were selected from among students studying in grade four of senior high school. The reason was that all of them had already taken the same final test (generally administered in a similar way all over the country) as the final test in grade three and the test could be regarded as an indicator of their achievement in the English course.

The data for the study were collected from a total of six schools in Kermanshah. In fact, two schools (one girls' and the other boys' school) were randomly selected from each of the following areas: the uptown, midtown and downtown neighbourhoods. Besides, since according to Krejcie and Morgan (1976), in a study which covers a population of 30000 or more a sample made up of 379 participants would suffice, the researchers randomly selected 400 participants—200 monolinguals and 200 bilinguals—from among 30065 students in the schools for inclusion in the study as explained below.

A brief oral interview was conducted to check on the language background of the students in these schools (in terms of both their bilinguality vs. monolinguality and their previous education in English) and their families' socioeconomic status (determined based on the criteria mentioned below). This interview helped the classification of the participants into bilingual learners who were raised in a linguistic community where both parents were Kurds and used Kalhuri in the family and the monolingual Kurd learners who were able to speak only Persian not Kalhuri because their parents, in spite of being Kurds, spoke to them in Persian from birth. Another reason why the interview was conducted was to obtain the necessary information regarding the

students' previous education in English so that care would be exercised to select those students who had not received any extra-curricular instruction in English (in language institutes). In addition, the interview was conducted to collect information about the participants' socioeconomic status and to put them into three different groups with high, middle and low socioeconomic status as follows.

The socioeconomic status of the participants was determined by considering their parents' income rate, education level and place of residence as explicated in Table 1. In this study, the participants who had at least two of the attributes mentioned for each level were classified as belonging to that socioeconomic group.

Table 1. Attributes used to classify the participants into three socioeconomic groups

SES	Place of residence	Parents' income rate	Parent's/(s) education level
High	Uptown neighborhoods	2 million Tomans and above	MA/MS or above
Mid	Midtown neighborhoods	1 to 2 million Tomans	BA/BS
Low	Downtown neighborhoods	Below 1 million Tomans	Below BA/BS

Table 2 shows the details regarding the distribution of the participants in different groups based on their language status (monolingual vs. bilingual), socioeconomic status (high, mid and low) and gender (female vs. male).

Table 2. Distribution of participants in different groups

Language Status	SES			Total
	High	Mid	Low	
Monolingual	110	71	19	200
	Male	Male	Male	Male
	54	34	7	95
	Female	Female	Female	Female
	56	37	12	105
Bilingual	15	85	100	200
	Male	Male	Male	Male
	6	40	46	92
	Female	Female	Female	Female
	9	45	54	108

3.2 Instruments

Information collected from two sources comprised the data for the study: the scores on the achievement test uniformly administered to all high school third-graders and the information gathered from the brief interviews explained above. The end-of-the-year English language achievement test for third-graders in high schools in Iran is a written test which measures the achievement of the students in all the areas in the syllabus covered over the course of the year. It encompasses items on grammatical structures (7 items), spelling (2 items), (the so-called) pronunciation (one multiple-choice and one open-ended form item), vocabulary use (7 items), language functions (2 items), reading comprehension (sentence comprehension 3 items and passage comprehension 5 items), and scrambled sentences (2 items). The students' answers to the test items are scored blindly by the staffs appointed by the Office of Education in advance for this purpose in each city. The test scores obtained by the students were used as the measure of the students' English language achievement. The reliability of test scores was obtained through subjecting a sample of 50 participants' scores to Kuder-Richardson formula and an index of 0.80 was obtained which is satisfactorily high.

3.3 Data analyses

In order to answer the first research question, the information regarding the gender of the participants and their language status (bilingual vs. monolingual) were subjected to the phi test. Then the participants' demographic data regarding their socioeconomic status and their language status were subjected to Cramer's V test to determine whether there was an association between gender and language status (i.e., bilinguality vs. monolinguality). Finally, the participants' demographic information as to their gender, socio-economic status and their language status and their language achievement test scores were subjected to a three-way ANOVA to answer the third research question.

4. Results and Discussion

With respect to the first research question which concerned the relationship between the participants' gender and their language status, as Table 3 depicts, it was found that gender was not related to the students' bilinguality vs. monolinguality ($\phi = .015$ $p > .05$).

Table 3. Results of Phi for the relationship between the participants' gender and language status

Language	Male	Female	Total	Phi statistics
Monolingual	95	105	200	Phi=.015
Bilingual	92	108	200	sig=.764
Total	187	213	400	

The reason may lie in the fact that the choice of being bilingual or monolingual had not been made by the participants and it was their parents who provided the chance for the participants to become either bilingual or monolingual. In other words, female/male students themselves did not voluntarily decide to become bilinguals or monolinguals: this opportunity had been provided for both sexes equally by their parents at home not via formal teaching.

As for the second research question and the relationship between the participants' socioeconomic status and their bilinguality vs. monolinguality, the results presented in Table 4 show that there is a strong relationship between the socioeconomic status of the participants and their bilinguality vs. monolinguality (Cramer's Value=.567 $p<.001$).

Table 4. Results of Cramer's V for the relationship between the participants' language and socioeconomic status

Language	SES			Total	Cramer's V statistics
	High	Mid	Low		
Monolingual	110	71	19	200	Cramer's value=.567 sig=.000
Bilingual	15	85	100	200	
Total	125	156	119	400	

In fact, the data presented in the above table indicate that the students belonging to the high socioeconomic level were mostly monolinguals (110 out of 125) whereas those who belonged to the low socioeconomic level were mostly bilinguals (100 out of 119) and there was a rather equal distribution of monolinguals (71 out of 156) and bilinguals (85 out of 156) in the middle level. This means that parents with high socioeconomic status tended to raise their children monolingually (in Persian) whereas those with low socioeconomic status tended to rear their children bilingually (both in Kalhuri Kurdish and in Persian). This is in line with the findings of Ransdell & Wengelin (2003) in that bilingual students participating in the current study mainly came from economically low status families.

As for the effect of the participants' gender, language status and socioeconomic level on their English language achievement, different groups of participants' end-of-the-year English language achievement test scores were first compared. Table 5 shows the relevant descriptive statistics.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of English language achievement test scores of different groups of participants

	Group	N	Mean	SD
Language Status	Bilingual	200	16.88	2.14
	Monolingual	200	12.92	2.17
Gender	Male	187	14.86	2.90
	Female	213	14.93	2.95
Socio-economic status (SES)	High	125	13.48	2.44
	Mid	156	14.86	3.06
	Low	119	16.43	2.42

According to the table, the mean of the English language achievement test scores of the bilingual participants (16.88) was greater than that of their monolingual peers (12.92). Nevertheless, the performance of the male participants (Mean=14.86) was rather similar to that of female participants (Mean=14.93). As for the socio-economic status, it seems that the students' English language achievement scores had a negative relationship with their socio-economic status: students with high socio-economic status obtained a mean score of 13.48, and the ones with mid socioeconomic status achieved a mean score of 14.86 whereas the students belonging to the low socio-economic group obtained the mean score of 16.43.

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	Female	213	14.93	2.95
Socio-economic status (SES)	High	125	13.48	2.44
	Mid	156	14.86	3.06
	Low	119	16.43	2.42

Regarding the third research question, to see if the effect of gender, socioeconomic and language status of the participants on their English

language achievement test scores was significant, a three-way ANOVA was run the results of which are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of three-way ANOVA for the effect of participants' language status, socioeconomic level, and gender on their English language achievement test scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1614.530 ^a	11	146.775	31.491	.000
Intercept	47694.619	1	47694.619	1.023	.000
Language	776.449	1	776.449	166.589	.000
SES	22.602	2	11.301	2.425	.090
Gender	11.882	1	11.882	2.549	.111
Language* SES	10.451	2	5.226	1.121	.327
Language * Gender	.122	1	.122	.026	.872
SES* Gender	6.569	2	3.285	.705	.495
Language*SES* Gender	29.568	2	14.784	3.172	.043
Error	1808.418	388	4.661		
Total	92256.750	400			
Corrected Total	3422.947	399			

a. R Squared =.472 (Adjusted R Squared=.457)

Results of the ANOVA show that while language status (monolinguality vs. bilinguality) had a significant effect on the participants' achievement in English ($F(1, 399)=166.589, p<.001$), the main effects of socioeconomic status ($F(2, 398)=2.425, p>.05$) and gender ($F(1, 399)=2.549, p>.05$) were not significant. In addition, whereas the interaction of language status and socioeconomic level ($F(2, 398)=1.121, p>.05$) and language status and gender ($F(1,399)=.026, p>.05$), and socioeconomic status and gender ($F(2, 398)=.705, p>.05$) were not significant, the interaction of the three variables under study had a significant effect on the participants' achievement in English ($F(2, 398)=3.172, p<.05$). Moreover, the results indicate a large effect size for language status ($\eta^2=.300$), but a small effect size for the interaction of language status, socio-economic level and gender ($\eta^2=.16$).

These results suggest that the difference between the two language groups' (i.e., bilingual and monolingual participants) English language achievement test scores is statistically significant and, thus, students

raised bilingually (Mean= 16.88, SD=2.14) had a significantly better performance on the achievement test than their monolingual peers (Mean=12.92, SD= 2.17). This is in line with the results of some of the studies reviewed above with regard to the advantage of bilinguals over monolinguals in many areas of language acquisition. Specifically, these results support those of Bialystok (2001a, 2001b), Bialystok and Martin (2004), Munoz (2000), Ringbom (2007) and Sanz (2000) in that they found that bilingual individuals outperformed their monolingual counterparts in different areas. However, the results contradict those of Van Gelderen et al. (2003), Sanders and Meijers (cited in Bhatia & Ritchie, 2012) and Okita and Jun Hai (2001) which showed no or even a negative effect of bilinguality on the acquisition of (different components of) an additional language.

Nonetheless, inasmuch as the statistical data analyses presented in Table 6 showed that the main effects of socioeconomic status and gender as well as the interaction of language status and gender, language status and socioeconomic level and gender and socioeconomic status on the participants' English language achievement test scores were insignificant, the results of the present study contradict some earlier research findings (e.g., Bowey, 1995; Hakuta et al., 2000; Jorgensen, 2003). However, as Ellis (2008) comments on the relationship between gender and superiority in language learning, one may conclude that individuals learn an additional language due to a variety of reasons and because of different incentives and opportunities that the language may provide them with. Therefore, it seems that variables such as language status, gender or socioeconomic status *pre se* may not be the only reasons for one group's greater success in language learning.

Furthermore, the significant interaction of the three variables under study (Table 6) indicates that the interaction of gender and socioeconomic status varies as a function of the different levels of language status. To illustrate the effect on the English language achievement test scores of the participants, the interaction of gender and socioeconomic status was plotted for each level of language status: first for monolinguals (Figure 1) and then for bilinguals (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Effect of the interaction of gender and socioeconomic status on monolinguals' English language achievement test scores

Estimated Marginal Means of English achievement at Language status = Monolingual

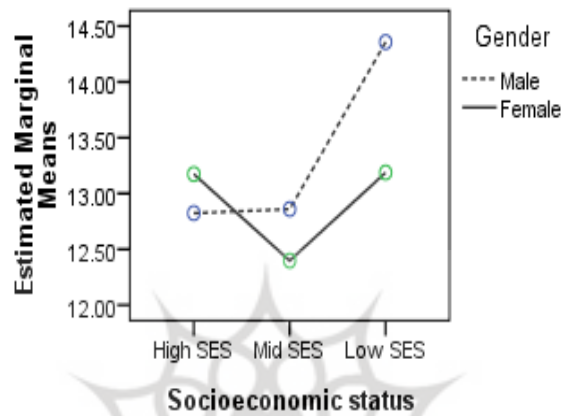
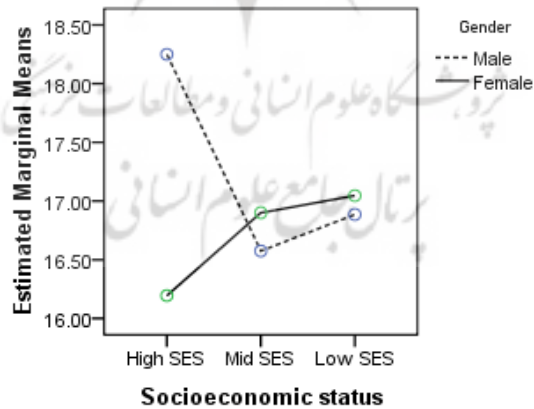


Figure 2. Effect of the interaction of gender and socioeconomic status on bilinguals' English language achievement test scores

Estimated Marginal Means of English achievement at Language Status = Bilingual



The above figures indicate a significant interaction of the two variables in both language groups. In order to statistically verify the above speculation, further follow-up analyses were run. To save space, here we only report the results which indicated significant differences

between the groups. The analyses showed that in the monolingual group the interaction of gender and socioeconomic status was significant and male participants with low socioeconomic status achieved significantly better test scores (Mean=14.35 SD=.67) than their female counterparts (Mean=13.18 SD=1.65). In the bilingual group, again the interaction of gender and socioeconomic status showed significant differences and the comparisons confirmed that male participants with high socioeconomic status (Mean=18.25 SD=2.15) achieved significantly better scores than their female counterparts (Mean=16.19 SD=2.59). These results, though unprecedented in the literature, imply that the interaction of the three variables of language status, gender and socioeconomic status may affect additional language learning significantly.

5. Conclusion

Most lay people often think that acquiring two languages is more difficult than acquiring one and that it will take children longer to acquire two languages. However, as Genesee (2012) maintains both bilingual and monolingual children follow the same procedure and acquire the same basic principles in language acquisition at about the same age. Contrary to the concerns often expressed by parents and even some educators and professionals with regard to raising children bilingually, the present study showed that bilingual learners outperformed their monolingual peers in learning an additional language (English). In fact, these results challenge lay people's conjectures that bringing up children monolingually helps them to learn another language or raising them bilingually causes deficiency in additional language learning. Apparently, bilinguality not only is not a hindrance but also has an enhancing role in learning another language. Accordingly, it is recommended that policy makers in education, in general, and language teaching, in particular, should inform people, especially parents, of the advantages of bilinguality over monolinguality in additional language learning. Public awareness of the benefits of bilinguality will not only help to enhance the status of additional language learning but also help to improve the status of minority languages which may even be endangered as a result of common misconceptions and wrong beliefs. However, since the results of the study showed the significant interaction of language status, socioeconomic status and gender in a rather unexpected way which was unprecedented in the literature, further investigation of the issue seems warranted.

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